

ANNALS  
OF  
*The Transvaal Museum.*

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**A SHORT HISTORY OF THE TRANSVAAL MUSEUM.**

By Dr. J. W. B. GUNNING, Director.

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In sending the first number of the Annals of the Transvaal Museum out into the world, it may be of some interest to review the history of this Institution.

In 1892 the Government of the late South African Republic, at the initiative of the State Secretary, Dr. W. J. Leyds, decided to found a State Museum for the Republic in Pretoria, and appointed the following gentlemen as a Board of Management or Trustees, "Curatoren": Dr. N. Mansvelt, Dr. G. S. W. Lingbeek, Dr. H. G. Breyer, Dr. Fockens and Geo. Leith, Esq.

Of these gentlemen, the Superintendent of Education was *ex officio* Chairman, and the Institution resorted under his Department.

At this period there existed no public collections of the Fauna, the Flora, or the Ethnography of the Transvaal, and it was the first aim of this Institution to collect these objects as well as exhibits of historical and national interest.

Whilst the first aim was the scientific exploration of the State and the making and preserving of scientific collections as the natural outcome of such explorations, the second and not less important aim was practical aid to education.

The Department of Education, under the guidance of Dr. Mansvelt, had erected many new schools, of which the "Gymnasium" or College, the "Model School" for boys, the "High School" for girls, the "Normal School," and the "School of Mines" were the most important.



*Plate 1.* HALL No. 1.—South African Birds; in the centre cases a few Economic Plants, Under the shades, Egg Collection.



HALL No. 2.—South African Mammals.

Teaching in Zoology, Botany, Mineralogy and allied Sciences was much impeded by the want of books suitable for South African schools, and ocular demonstration of the objects of Natural History in the Museum collection was to assist in the teaching of these subjects, where handbooks were often of little value.

Of course, systematic collections of all animals, plants and minerals, to be found within the boundaries of the Republic were to be made for systematic scientific work, but with the educational object in view considerable sums of money were spent to procure types of families and groups of Mammals and Birds which do not occur in South Africa, but which are mentioned in the handbooks in use here at the time.

Later on a very extensive collection of minerals and fossils was purchased by the Museum to serve with the instruction in Mineralogy and Geology in the School of Mines. This collection is at present on loan and temporarily embodied in the collections of the Geological Survey.

The second and certainly not less important aim with the founding of the State Museum was the fostering of the love of the country, the stimulating of the national pride, the encouraging of the consciousness in the people that this State was but a part of a homogeneous complex of States and Colonies in South Africa, that the past of all these countries was the same, that the great men and great heroes of each component part belong *ipso facto* to the remainder, that origin, present and future, were and should ever be one and the same.

In order to portray the past clearly before the mind's eye of the present and future generations, in order to instil love and respect for those who helped to shape the destiny of the South African nation as a whole, great attention was to be paid to the collecting of historical relics, first of all in connection with persons and matters of this country, and further in connection with all South Africa.

We, therefore, find that all appeals made to the public for support, and all circulars issued during the first years of the Museum's existence lay special stress on these main thoughts : the Museum shall be *Educational* and therefore be in constant touch with teachers and pupils which it shall reach through the Education Department, and the Museum shall be *Historical*, *i.e.*, it shall show the history of the past, and by fostering love and respect for a glorious past shall be instrumental in building up a noble South African nation.

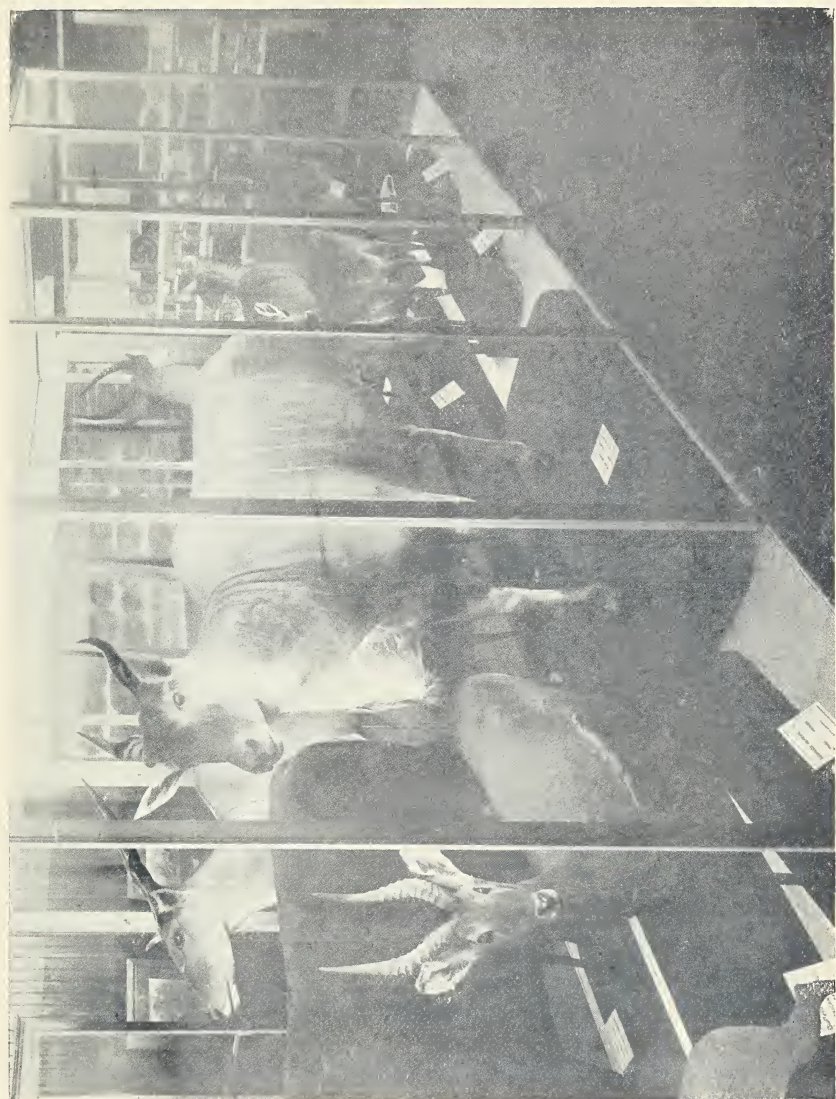


Plate III.

HALL No. 3. S. A. Mammals, Reptiles and Fishes.

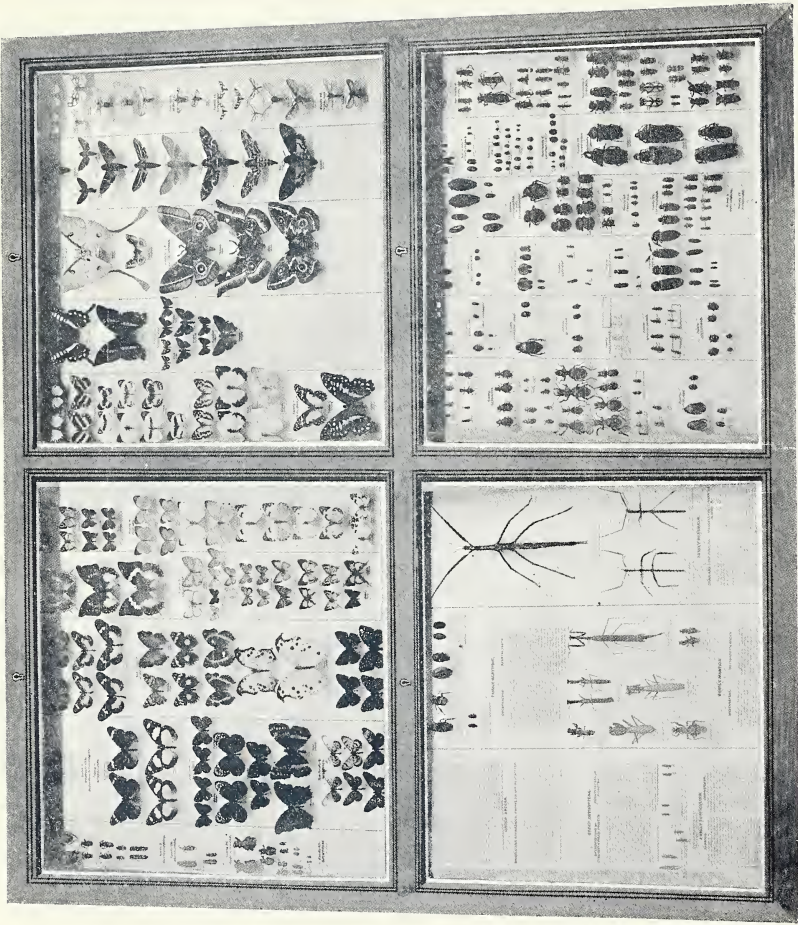


Plate IV.

HALL No. 4.—Insects.

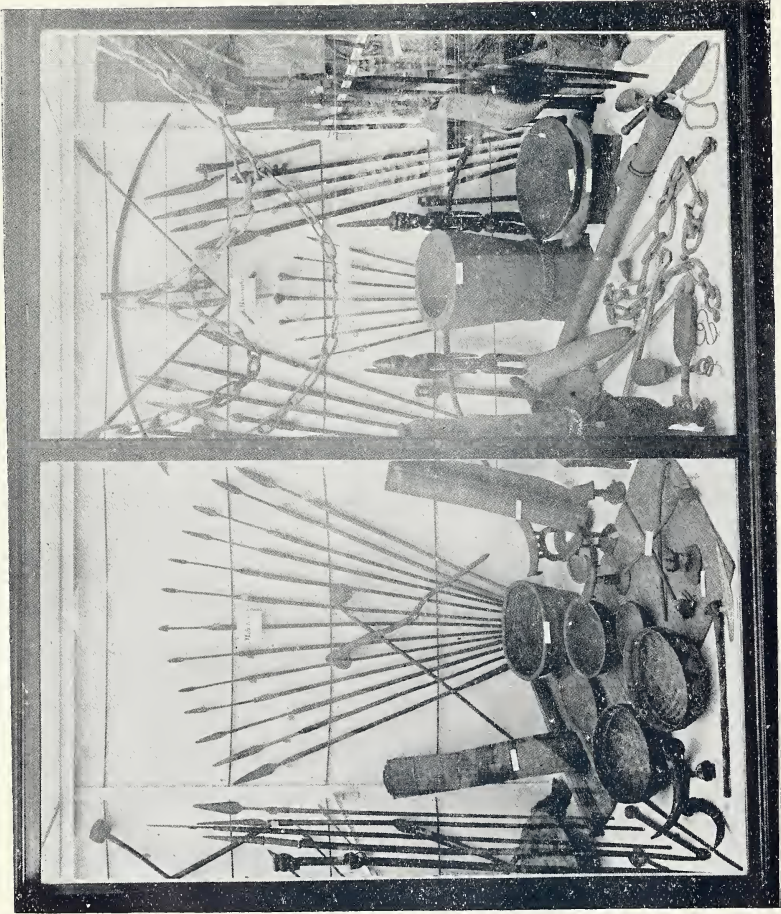
During the first years great difficulty was experienced in securing the services of a suitable person as Curator to the young Institution. The collections were yet too small and unimportant to warrant the appointment of a qualified Museum expert, yet the interest that was manifested by the farmer population especially made the collection extend so soon that judicious organisation and scientific classification of the many objects became an absolute necessity. At last one of the members of the Board of Management, Dr. H. G. Breyer, accepted the honorary Curatorship and the name of this scientist, who had done so much for the sake of education as member of the teaching staff of the "Gymnasium" and as Director of the School of Mines, was sufficient guarantee that henceforth the work of the Museum should be performed and led in a thorough and scientific way.

Soon, however, the work became too much for an Honorary Curator, who necessarily could only devote a few hours a week to the work, and a permanent Director was appointed in 1896, when Dr. J. W. B. Gunning undertook the duties of the newly created post.

A few months later Mr. Swierstra was appointed Entomological Assistant, and Miss Leendertz Botanical Assistant; Dr. Gough joined the Museum Staff in 1906 as Assistant for Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates except insects.

With the exception of the mounted collections above referred to, all the exhibits were mounted in the Museum, first by Mr. Wilde, after him by Messrs Krantz and Griffin; Mr. Noome, who is at present the only Taxidermist, joined the Museum in 1897.

When the Museum was started the collections were housed in a small room next to the clock-room in the top storey of the Government Buildings, but this room very soon became too small and besides it was not easy of access to visitors, and the small Market Hall in Market Square was then hired and the collections transferred thither. Here the Museum remained till 1902; the new building at present in use was commenced in 1899—the foundation stone was laid by the Superintendent of Education on the 22nd July, 1899—but the unfortunate war interfered with the building operations, which were not completed until 1902, when it was opened to the public by the Acting Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Richard Solomon, on 15th December, 1904. During the last years of the old Government the Institution had a yearly grant of



*Plate V.* HALL No. 4.—Corner of Ethnographical Collection



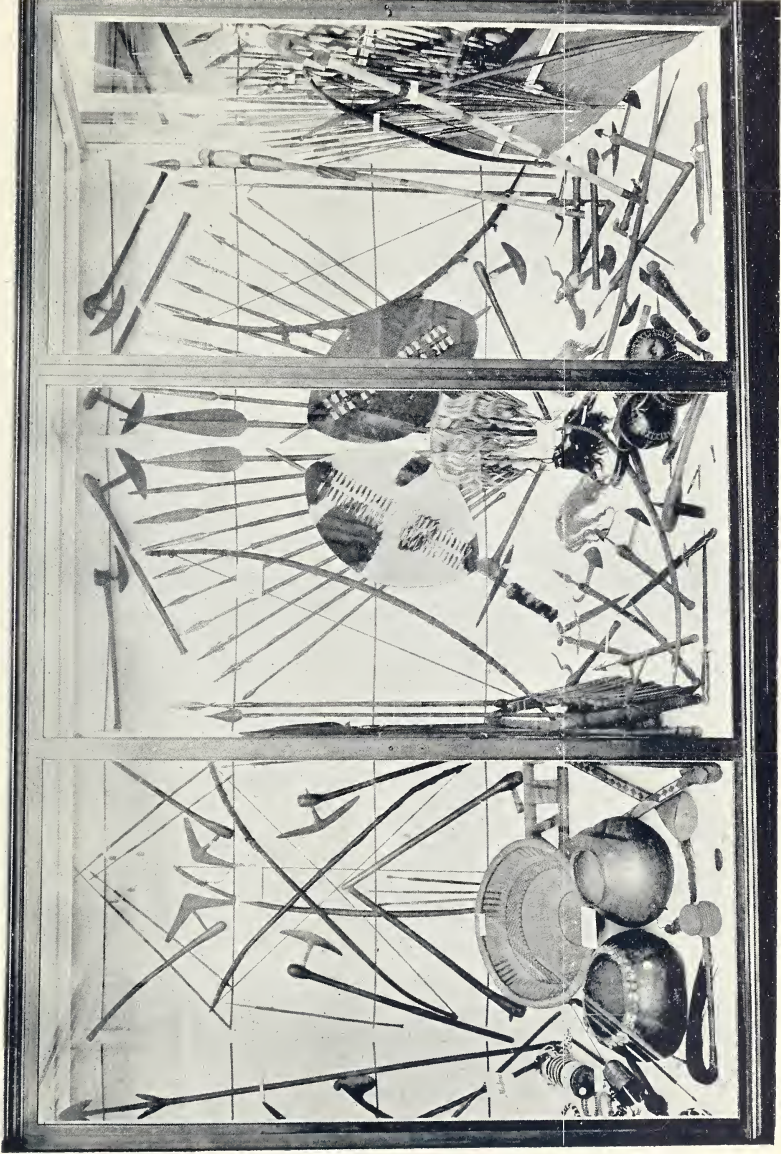


Plate VI.

Portion of Ethnographical Collection.

£6,000, and a substantial part of this sum was used in procuring a good nucleus of a Library, that most important part of any museum in which it is intended to undertake sound work.

The collections which are at present accessible to the public are exhibited in six halls; the first contains the mounted South African birds, their nests and eggs; the second and third, the mounted South African mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fishes, and in one case an exhibit is put on view of the most important internal and external parasites that cause so much damage to the flocks of the farmers in this Colony, which is to be regarded as the nucleus of an Agricultural Museum. Room four contains part of the historical and ethnographical collections and coins, room five non-African birds, and room six the non-African mammals.

The collections of vertebrates consist now of:—

<i>Specimens.</i>		
South African mammals	..	259
„ „ birds	.. ..	1,035
„ „ bird skins	..	3,703
„ „ reptiles—		
	snakes, <i>circa</i>	620
	lizards ..	600
„ „ batrachians	..	200
„ „ fishes, about	..	80
Non-South African mammals..		190
„ „ „ birds	..	168
„ „ „ reptiles, <i>circa</i>		500
„ „ „ bird skins		590
„ „ „ batrachians,		
	<i>circa</i> ..	20
„ „ „ fishes, <i>circa</i>		400

All specimens are card catalogued, and it is intended to publish in every subsequent issue of the Annals part of our catalogues.

Through want of space the whole of the collections of Conchylia, the Mineralogical and Palaeontological, the greater part of the Historical and Ethnographical and coin collections are stored away, as is also the large and interesting collection of Crania.

The Entomological collections are likewise not accessible to the general public. Over 125,000 South African specimens

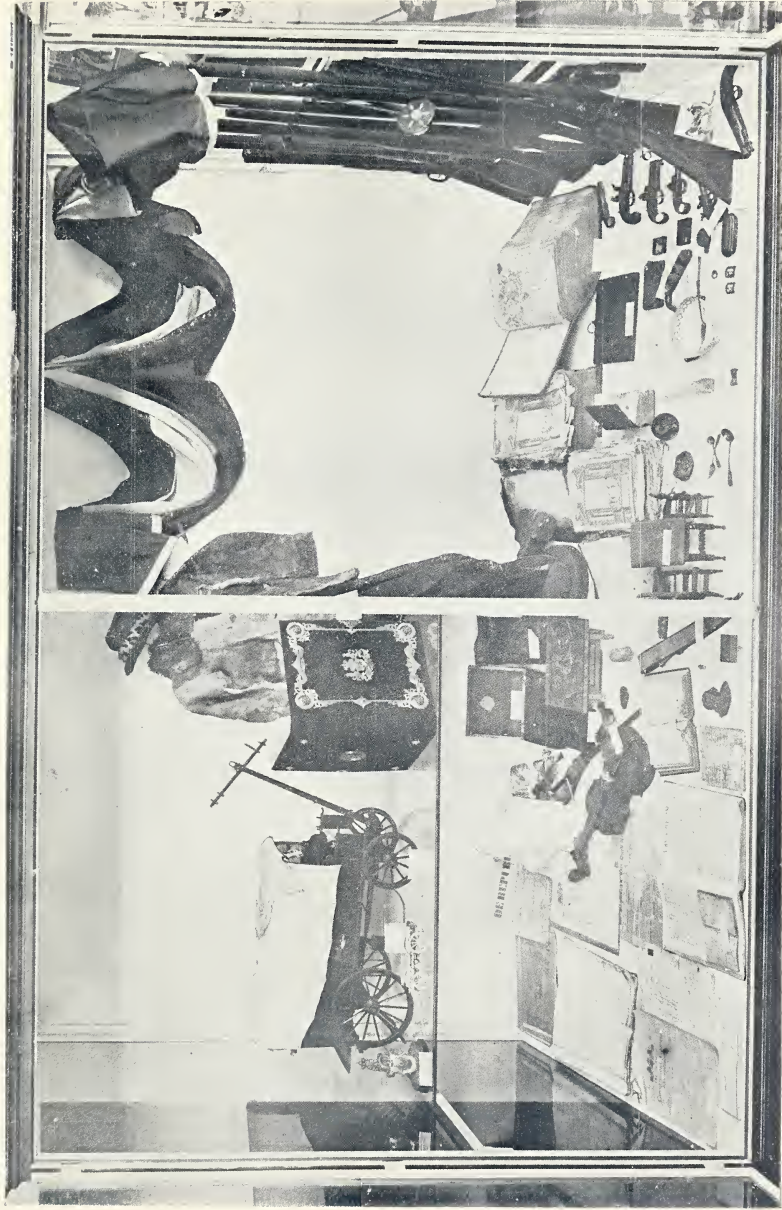


Plate VII.

Historical Exhibits.



*Plate VIII.*

**Non-South African Mammals.**

are named and classified, but want of cabinets and space prevents the scientific classification of the thousands of exotic insects which have been acquired by exchange of our duplicates with European and other Museums and private collectors.

The important Herbarium, consisting of over 4,000 named, mounted and classified Transvaal plants, is housed in a small room at the end of the exhibition halls, whereas the reference library is, for the same want of space, divided in the Director's, Entomological, Botanical and Herpetological rooms.

In response to often repeated requests it has been decided long ago to start with a yearly series of Museum lectures in order to popularise science and to make the valuable collections more useful in an educational way, but as no lecture hall exists in the building this idea had to be abandoned for the present, as the carting over of specimens to a suitable hall in town would expose the specimens to too many dangers.

In the store-rooms and cellars a large number of South African mammal skins is stored away, partly for reference and study, partly for mounting when space, time and money allows.

In issuing the first number of the Annals of the youngest South African Museum this Institution recommends itself to the kind and collegial co-operation of the older South African and of the other Museums of the World.